



U.S. LABOR AGAINST THE WAR



Twenty Propositions about Economic Conversion & Just Transition

By Michael Eisenscher, USLAW National Coordinator at Labor Notes Conference 4/6/14

1. Continuing increases in the size of the military budget are no longer a given. Military spending between 2012 and 2013 actually decreased. Sequestration and the budget deal struck in Congress will continue to exert downward pressure on Pentagon spending. *Cuts are a reality, not a future possibility.*
2. Winding down the Afghan War will make it harder for Congress to give the military more than the deal calls for; pressure is building to end the Overseas Contingency Operations budget (against which the Pentagon and military contractors are putting up a ferocious fight).
3. This will translate into cutbacks in or limits to new military contracts. Some current contracts will be trimmed. Pressure will grow to close military bases, put limits on development of new weapons systems, eliminate some existing weapons and reduce acquisition of those that are retained.
4. The size of the military is going to be cut, perhaps to as few as 420 to 490 thousand active duty personnel from a wartime peak of 570,000. In addition, there will be significant cuts to the non-military Pentagon workforce. This will result in commensurate reductions in the acquisition of supplies and equipment they require. More of the work now performed by government employees will be outsourced.
5. This will have an economic impact on industries, businesses, the workforce employed by them, the unions that represent them, and the communities in which they work and reside (and their revenue for public services) - especially those communities significantly dependent on military contracting.
6. Businesses, communities and workers who fail to anticipate and prepare for these changes will be most heavily impacted. They can lobby to reverse the cuts, expand or seek sales of weapons and other military goods they produce in markets outside the US, or develop new products for non-military markets that don't depend on Pentagon acquisitions.
7. Without a "Plan B", however, these communities, businesses and the workers employed by them are going to be unprepared for cuts when they come, will suffer the greatest economic hardship, and will have the most difficult road to recovery.
8. Calling for a smaller military budget brings with it an obligation to address the impact of a reduction in military spending on those who are now dependent on jobs in the military-industrial complex. They should not become road kill on the road to a smaller military.
9. There are alternatives. It is possible to avoid the worst effects and recover from them more quickly if they act now to develop new uses for the physical assets and workforce skills, promote alternative community economic development strategies, and provide transition assistance to those most severely impacted. The federal government even has an office in the Pentagon (Office of Economic Adjustment) through which communities can secure economic transition planning grants.
10. Relative to many others in the workforce, military sector workers are better paid, enjoy better benefits, are more widely represented by unions and have had greater employment stability. But whether they will be able to maintain these standards may depend on whether they are prepared to fight for a broader agenda than simply the maintenance of their own standard of living and employment security.
11. Our definition of "national security" should be aligned with and defined by our values, not by our fears. Our values call upon us to address social conditions far beyond the parameters of the military-industrial-Congressional complex.

12. The fight for economic conversion must be conducted within the broader struggle for economic justice for the most exploited, under-paid, under-benefited - those with the least security. This is the basis of what is called a “just transition.” The fruits of the transition from military dependency to a demilitarized sustainable economy must be shared broadly if that transition is to be achievable and sustained.
13. This calls upon us to look at economic development in new ways that are environmentally sustainable, socially responsible, equitable and just, and that generate a national conversation about the kind of economy we need to have the kind of lives we want to lead in a society and economy that works for us all, rather than only for a privileged few.
14. Those whose jobs are at stake must see that they cannot secure their own futures and that of their children without making common bond with those who have no jobs, are marginally employed, work in dead-end jobs or in the underground economy. If we want an economy that works for us rather than one in which we are at the mercy of multinational corporations and an economic royalty who answers only to itself, we need to figure out where opportunities for building unity and solidarity lie and aggressively pursue them.
15. Austerity is a weapon of the powerful to extract advantage over the powerless. They become prosperous at the expense of the rest of us. The solution to austerity is shared prosperity, but that cannot be achieved by defining interests narrowly. Increasingly, success will be determined by the degree to which we learn to fight for our own interests by fighting for the common interest.
16. This not myopic idealism. It is the recognition of social reality and looking beyond the trench we are in at the battlefield on which we have been forced to fight.
17. The struggle for a new kind of economy requires that we build a new kind of labor movement - one that works for all working people, not just union members.
18. *Economic transformation required to meet society’s social needs is not something that can be accomplished without a movement demanding it.* It requires that we develop ongoing partnerships between labor and environmentalists, economic, racial and social justice organizations, the women’s and LGBT movements, antiwar and anti-imperialist forces, the faith community and progressive political organizations. We must break down the walls that divide us.
19. The fight to demilitarize U.S. foreign policy is inextricably tied to the fight for a new economy. Our militarized economy drives the government’s militarized foreign policy, while that foreign policy paves the road for the militarized economy. They feed one another. When we struggle against militarism and war, we are opening a space for the development of a new economy. And we cannot make serious progress in changing foreign policy unless we begin to dismantle the military-industrial-Congressional complex in whose service foreign policy operates.
20. At a 1984 international conference on economic conversion held in Boston, its organizer Suzanne Gordon made the following observation,

“The moment you say convert you have to say convert to what and that immediately begins a democratic conversation about what we should be producing in this society...whose interests that production should serve. Should it serve people in need, the majority of people in society? Or should it serve to advance the profit-margins of multinational corporations. It’s a strategy about empowering people because it gives workers in a factory and community residents and people in need a say, not only in what is produced but how it is produced, what’s the technology, where it’s produced and so-forth. So conversion really is a very critical concept about democracy. Its central core is democracy.” That was right on then and is right on now.